

Garuda Puran

Background

Garuda Puran is a dialogue between Lord Vishnu and Garuda narrated by sage Suta. It comprises of sixteen chapters as under:

- Chapter 1: Miseries of the Sinners in this World and Hereafter
- Chapter 2: Description of Way to Yama
- Chapter 3: Torments of Yama
- Chapter 4: Description of Sins that lead to Hell
- Chapter 5: Description of Signs of Sins and Classes of Rebirth after Term in Hell
- Chapter 6: Description of Miseries of the Birth of the Sinful
- Chapter 7: Description of the Sacrament for the Dead
- Chapter 8: Description of the Gifts for the Dying
- Chapter 9: Description of the Rites for the Dying
- Chapter 10: Description of collecting Bones from the Fire and other Rites
- Chapter 11: Description of 10-days Ceremonies
- Chapter 12: Description of the 11th Day Rite
- Chapter 13: Description of Ceremonies for Ancestors
- Chapter 14: Description of City of Lord of Justice (Dharamraja) – Impenetrable by gods and demons.
- Chapter 15: Description of Rebirth after Term in Heaven; Parts of Body; Nerves, Artery, Ducts, Veins; *Pranas*; Cosmos within Body; Six *Chakras* and Seed Sounds of Language (16 vowels and 36 consonants); Stillness of Mind and Yoga under the guidance of a Realized Teacher.
- Chapter 16: Description of the Law of Liberation

Garuda Puran is used at funeral ceremonies and due to fear and ignorance; people do not keep it in the house. Chapters 15 and 16 are the most wonderful part of this Puran and we deprive ourselves of the knowledge contained therein by not reading it.

Chapter 16

Description of the Law of Liberation

Garuda said:

- I have heard from you, O Ocean of compassion, about the transmigration of the individual, through ignorance, in the worlds of change. **I now wish to hear about the means for eternal liberation.**
- O compassionate Lord, -- **in this terrible world of change, in the unsubstantial, in all deep miseries, the endless multitudes of individuals, placed in various kinds of bodies, are born and die -- of them no end is known.**

- **Always miserable in this world, no one is ever known to be happy. O Lord of Liberation, tell me by what means they may obtain release, O Lord.**

The Blessed Lord said:

- Listen, O Garuda, I will explain to you what you have asked, even by the hearing of which a man is released* from the world of change.

[*By hearing alone to any discourse, liberation is not possible. What it implies is that armed with this knowledge one gets motivated to seek liberation from this ever changing world. Reflect over what you hear and then put it in practice because liberation has to be achieved while in human body under the guidance of an adept Teacher and not by mere words of a discourse.]

- There is a Shining One, Shiva, who has the nature of Supreme Brahman, who is part-less, all-knowing, all-doing, Lord of all, stainless and second-less, Self-illuminated, beginning-less and endless, beyond the Beyond, without attributes, Being and Knowing and Bliss. **That which is considered the individual is a part of Him.**
- **These, like sparks of a fire, with beginning-less ignorance, separated and encased in bodies by beginning-less karma, are fettered by forms of good and evil, giving happiness and misery, -- with bonds of caste, colour, creed and nationality, length of life, and fortune-miseries born of karma.**
- **In every life obtained, they have also, O Garuda, a higher and more subtle body, the subtle-linga-body (ethereal form of corporeal body), lasting until liberation.**
- **Listen now the order of liberation.** First the unmoving things (inanimate), followed by (animate) worms, plant kingdom, birds, animals, men, the righteous, the thirty-three deities, and also the liberated, according to their order, having worn and cast aside the four sorts of bodies* thousands of times, one becomes a man by good deeds, and if he becomes a knower (one who knows the Self) he attains liberation.

[*Four sorts of bodies are: Pindaj – a creature born with a life from the womb; Andaj – born out of an egg; Swedaj – born out of perspiration; and Udhbhij – plants that sprout from ground, vegetation.]
- **The embodied, in the eighty-four hundred thousands of bodies before attaining human birth, can obtain no knowledge of the truth. Through millions of myriads of thousands of births some time a being obtains human birth, through the accumulation of merit.**

- **He who, having obtained a human body, difficult to get, and a step to liberation, does not help himself over, -- who in this world is more sinful than he?**
- The man who, having obtained this highest birth and superior senses, does not understand what benefits the soul is a slayer of Brahman.
- **Without a body, nobody obtains the object of human life; therefore should he guard his body and wealth and perform meritorious deeds. He should always guard his soul, which is the means to everything.** Living, he should make every effort to protect it, in view of welfare.
- A village again, a field again, wealth again, a house again, good and evil actions again -- the body never again (meaning that one may re-obtain these things after losing them -- but not the body).
- The wise always adopt means for the preservation of the body; even those afflicted with diseases such as leprosy do not wish to give it up.
- **It should be guarded for the sake of duty; duty for the sake of knowledge; knowledge for the sake of Yoga-meditation, -- then he is soon released.**
- If he does not guard his soul against harm who else will? Therefore should he look after his own benefit?
- **He who does not take precautions against the diseases of hell while here; afflicted with disease and having gone to a country where there is no medicine, what will he do?**
- Old age comes on like a tigress; life goes like water from a broken pot; diseases attack like foes. Therefore should he strive to know the means of liberation from the liberated?
- **So long as misery does not come, so long as calamity does not befall, so long as the senses are not decayed, so long should he practice to realize the knowledge of creative elements within as learnt from the liberated?**
- **So long as the body lasts, so long should truth be pursued, -- the stupid man digs his well when the corner of his house is already afire.**
- The time of death is not known by those who are variously embodied in the world of change. Alas! A man, between happiness and misery, does not know his own benefit.

- Though seeing those just born, the afflicted, the dead, those whom calamity has befallen, and the miserable, people are never afraid, having drunk the liquor of delusion.
- Riches are like unto a dream; youth is like a flower, life is fickle as lightning, -- where is there a discerning one who is at ease?
- Even a hundred years of life is very little, and half of it is sleep and idleness, and even that little is unfruitful owing to the miseries of childhood, disease and old age.
- He does not do what ought to be done; when he should be awake he sleeps; where he should fear he confides. Alas! What man is not stricken?
- How shall the individual who has taken a body, which is like foam on water and is attached to passing objects, be free from fear? Jiva is a part of Brahman, but resides in a temporal body. When it will realize Brahman within, it will immediately merge in its source. Then it will not depend upon temporal bodies for survival.
- He who does not know what is good for him thinks the harmful* beneficial, the impermanent** permanent, the misfortune*** (fortune) significant, and the evil good.

[*Harmful – *ahit vishay* – anything perceived by the senses is unfriendly, inimical, and injurious to soul.]

[**Impermanent – *adhruv deha* and *dhan* – impermanent body and possessions, when considered permanent are injurious to soul.]

[***Misfortune – *anarth* – root of fifteen misfortunes such as pride, falsehood, jealousy, wickedness, meanness, ill will, cupidity, covetousness, arrogance, conceit, deceit, malice, levity, sloth and torpor are all injurious to soul when considered significant.]

- Though seeing, he falters; though hearing, he does not understand; though reading, he does not know; bewildered by the divine magic.
- This universe is immersed in the boundless ocean of death, -- though grasped by the crocodiles of death, disease and old age, he does not understand.
- Time, though wearing away with every moment, is unnoticed, just as an unbaked pot placed in water disappears imperceptibly. Time is passing away

but man makes no effort to know the real nature of Time and subsequently make an effort to stop the wheel of Time.

- **Air may be enclosed, ether may be split; waves may be bound, -- life cannot be made permanent.** Earth is burnt away by time; even Meru is reduced to powder; the water of the ocean is dried away -- what shall be said of the body?
- **The wolf of death forcibly slays the lamb of a mortal, who prates of my offspring; my wife; my wealth; my relatives.**
- **This has been done; this is to be done; this other is done or not done. Him who is thus prating death overpowers.** It must be done to-morrow; it must be done to-day; in the morning or in the afternoon, -- death does not consider whether it has been done or not done.
- **Thou shalt encounter the enemy, death, whose coming is shown by age, who has an army of dreadful diseases -- wilt thou not see the saviour?**
- **Death preys upon the man with the needles of greed and thirst, bitten by the serpent of sense-objects, and baked in the fire of desire and repulsion.**
- **Death attacks children, young men, the old, those in the embryo condition, -- such is this world of creatures.**
- This individual, leaving his own body, goes to the abode of Yama. What is the good of association with wife, mother, father, son and others **if real purpose of human life that is realization of subtle Truth within is not accomplished?**
- **The world of change is verily the root of misery. He who is in it is afflicted with misery. He who abandons it becomes happy, -- otherwise never.**
- **This world of change, which is the source of all misery, the seat of all calamities, and the refuge of all sins, should be abandoned at once.**
- A man bound in fetters of iron or wood may be released, but from the fetters of son and wife can never be freed. So long as the being makes attachments pleasant to the mind, so long shall the dagger of sorrow pierce his heart.
- **People are destroyed every day by the desire for great wealth. Alas! Fie upon the foods of the senses, which steal away the nectar of life?**
- **Just as the fish, covetous of flesh, does not see the iron hook, so the embodied, covetous of pleasure, does not see the torments of Yama.**

Those men who do not understand what is good and what is not good for them, who constantly pursue evil courses, and are intent on the filling of the belly, are destined for hell, O Garuda.

- Sleep, sexual pleasure, and eating are common to all creatures. Who possesses knowledge is called a man, who is devoid of it is called a beast.
- Foolish men are tormented at break of day by nature's calls; when the sun is in the meridian by hunger and thirst; in the night by passion and sleep. All those beings who are attached to their bodies, wealth, wife and other things, are born and die deluded by ignorance, alas!
- Therefore attachment to things created be shunned always, and if it is not possible to give up these attachments, then friendship with the great (realized souls) be cultivated, as a remedy for attachment.
- Association with the realized persons is the remedy for this ever-changing world. Therefore, spiritual discourse* (*satsang*) and discrimination** (*vivek*) are two pure and stainless eyes and the man who does not have these, how shall he not tread evil ways?

[*Spiritual Discourse - *satsang* - as the name implies is association with Truth and therefore, is the gathering where a realized person preaches only One God and His Creative Power, the Word. Satsang is not a discourse on gods, demons, incarnations, past kings and sages because they are subject to change.]

[**Discrimination - *vivek* - is the wisdom, intelligence and reasoning faculty given to man to see the difference between what is right or wrong for him and choose accordingly. If man does not apply this faculty carefully then man will not be able to exercise control over his senses and is bound to tread evil ways.]

- All those deluded men who are engaged in the duties of their respective castes and orders, and do not understand the highest righteousness, perish fruitlessly.
- Some are intent upon ceremonies (*shraddh* - offering of water, food, etc. to the Brahmans in honour of manes), some take to the practice of vows and fasts; with self enveloped in ignorance the imposters go about.
- The men who are attached to the ceremonial (a system of rites or ceremonies; formalities proper to any occasion; *sanskar*) alone are satisfied with mere names, deluded by the repetitions of mantras, oblations and other things, and by elaborate rituals, they hope for liberation by such practices.

- The fools, bewildered by my *maya* (Ignorance), desire to obtain the invisible by fire sacrifice, religious sacrifice, single meals, fasts and other restraints, and by the emaciation of the body.
- But deluded by my *maya*, foolish people cannot achieve liberation by such methods.
- Of those who have no discrimination, what liberation can there be by bodily tortures alone? What great serpent is killed by beating the anthill alone?
- The hypocrites, putting on appearances, and wearing quantities of matted hair, and using antelope skins, wander about like knowers, and even delude people.
- He who is attached to the pleasures of the world of change, saying "I am a knower of Brahman," and is devoid of both action and Brahman should be shunned like a low outcaste.
- Those who walk about naked and unashamed like a donkey in houses and forests, how can they be liberated?
- If men are to be liberated by applying earth, ashes and dust; does the dog which always lives among earth and ashes become liberated?
- The jackals, rats, deer and others, which feed upon grass, leave and water, and always live in forests, -- do these become ascetics?
- The crocodiles, fishes and others, which from birth to death, dwell in the waters of Ganges, -- do these become Yogins?
- Pigeons at times eat stones, and Chataka birds do not drink water from the earth, -- are these observers of vows?

Garuda! All these acts are only for pleasure of people. Direct knowledge of the Truth, while in human body, is the cause of liberation.

- **Fallen into the great well of the six philosophies*** (Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Sankhya, Yoga, Mimansa, Vedanta) O Garuda, the brutes do not understand the subtle Truth; bound in the snare of animalism.

[These are six different schools of thought or six *Darshanas* or six demonstrations of Truth. Each school has developed, systematized and correlated the various parts of the *Veda* in its own way. **Nyaya**: represents the logical approach to spirituality, founded by Gautama Rishi. **Vaisheshika**: deals with the material

aspect of creation and the path of discrimination, founded by Kanada Rishi. **Sankhya**: presents a dualistic conception of purusha (soul) and prakriti (nature), founded by Kapila Muni. **Yoga**: concerns itself with physical and spiritual disciplines, and was founded by Patanjali. **Purva (or karma) Mimansa**: deals with outer practices, i.e. rituals, and was founded by Sage Jaimini. **Vedanta**: concerns itself with the realization of the Truth, and was founded by Sage Vyasa.]

- **They are tossed hither and thither in the dreadful ocean of Vedas and Shastras; caught in the six waves they remain sophists. They are not the knowers of Truth.**
- **He who knows the Vedas, the Shastras and the Puranas, but does not know the subtle truth, the best end, salvation -- of that imitator all this is as the speech of a crow.**
- The fools, decorated with garlands of poetry constructed of forms of speech, miserable with anxiety, remain with senses bewildered. Men trouble themselves variously, but the highest truth is otherwise; they explain in different ways but the best purport of the Shastras is otherwise.
- They talk of the highest experiences, not realizing them themselves. Some have ceased preaching, being engrossed in egotism. They repeat the Vedas and the Shastras, and argue with one another, but they do not understand the highest truth, -- like the spoon that is in the food but does not taste the flavour of the food.
- **"This is known; this must be known," -- thus bewildered by anxiety they read the scriptures day and night, turning away from the highest truth.** The fool, not knowing that the truth is seated in himself, is bewildered by the Shastras, -- a foolish goatherd, with the young goat under his arm, peers into the well.
- **Ignorance (*maya*) prevalent in this world cannot be annihilated by mere words of scriptures, as darkness cannot be dispelled by merely calling lamp.**
- Reading, to a man devoid of wisdom, is like a mirror to the blind; hence, for those who have understanding, Shastras are only a potter to the knowledge of the truth.
- "This is knowledge, this must be known," -- he wishes to hear everything from Shastras. If one lives for a thousand celestial years he cannot reach the end of the Shastras.

- The Shastras are numerous; life is brief; and there are tens of millions of obstacles; therefore the essence should be understood, -- like the swan taking the milk in the water.
- Having practised the Vedas and the Shastras, and having known the Truth, the wise man should abandon all the scriptures; just as one rich in grains abandons the straw.

O Garuda! Just as there is no use for food to one who is satisfied with nectar, so there is no use of the scriptures to the knower of the Truth.

- Garuda! There is no liberation by the study of the Vedas, or by the reading of the Shastras. Emancipation is by knowledge alone, not otherwise.
- The four stages of life are not the cause of liberation, nor are the six philosophies, nor are good deeds, -- knowledge only is the cause.
- The word from the Teacher gives liberation; all learning is masquerade. Among thousands of woods the Sanjivana (the plant brought by Hanuman to restore Lakshman when killed by Indrajit) is best. Repetition of the Name of God as spoken (word) from the mouth of a realized Teacher is the way to liberation.
- The non-dual, verily declared auspicious, is beyond efforts of action, and to be obtained by the word of the Teacher, not by the study of tens of millions of texts.
- Knowledge is said to be of two kinds: study and discrimination. The study is of Shabda Brahman; Para Brahman is reached by discrimination.
- Some prefer the Non-dual (*Advaita* philosophy, eternal in-separateness and non-duality), other prefer the Dual (*Dvaita* philosophy - separateness of the individual and universal self); **but they do not understand the One Reality, beyond the Dual and Non-dual.**
- Two phrases make for bondage and liberation: "Mine" and "Not-mine." The being saying "Mine" is bound; saying "Not-mine" is released.
- That is the karma that does not bind, that is the knowledge that gives release. Spiritual knowledge is different from the knowledge of various trades of the world. So long as actions are performed; so long as the impressions of the world of change remain, so long as the senses are fickle; so long how can there be realisation of Truth?

- So long as there is pride of body; so long as there is affection, greed, arrogance, avarice, selfishness; so long as there is excited striving; so long as there is imagination of plans; so long as there is no stability of mind; so long as there is no meditation (discernment, contemplation, reflection, reasoning) upon the Shastras; so long as there is no love for the Teacher; so long how can there be realisation of Truth? Grace of Teacher is a must for realization of self and God.
- *Jap* (the silent repetition of a Mantra, muttering of prayers); *Tap* (devotion, penance, religious austerity); *Havan* (fire sacrifice) and *Pujan* (worship, reverence, veneration); **pilgrimages** and **study** of Scriptures is only so long one does not realize the Truth within.

Therefore, if one desires liberation for himself, O Garuda, he should always strive under all circumstances for attainment of Truth.

- One who is tormented by the three miseries* and the rest should resort to the shade of the tree of Liberation, whose flowers are righteousness and knowledge, and fruits are heaven and liberation.

[*Three miseries – *Adhyatmik* misery pertains to soul as It being part of God has acquired superficial properties which are contrary to Its Source God and it bears the pain of separation; *Adhidaivik* misery (pertains to mind) is pain brought about through the influence of evil spirits or by fate; *Adhibhoutik* misery (pertains to body) is pain, affliction caused by material, circumstances.]

- Therefore from the mouth of the Blessed Teacher (Perfect Master) the Truth of the self should be known. By knowledge the being is easily released from the awful bondage of the worlds of change.

Listen! I will tell you now about the final actions of the knower of the Truth, by which he obtains liberation, which is called the Nirvana of Brahman.

- His last days approaching, the man, rid of fear, should cut off, with the sword of un-attachment, the desires connected with the body.
- Sitting in a solitary place and in prescribed seat, he should practise mentally upon the supreme three-fold pure Word of Brahman. He should, with breath controlled, restrain his mind, not forgetting the Brahman Bija (Bija is a seed; a mantra governing a work such as an Upanishad Om).
- With reason for charioteer he should withdraw the senses from the sense-objects by the mind, and should fix his mind, which is drawn away by karmas, with understanding, upon the pure.

- "I am Brahman, the Supreme Abode; I am Brahman, the Highest Goal," -- having realised this and placed the self in the Self he should meditate.
- He who, when leaving the body, utters the one-syllable Brahman, "Om," remembering me, goes to the Highest Goal.

The hypocrites, devoid of knowledge and un-attachment, do not go there. I will tell you about the wise, who go to that goal.

- Free from pride and delusion, with the evils of attachment conquered, always dwelling in the Higher Self, with desires overcome, released from the contracts known as pleasure and pain, they go, undeluded, on that eternal path.
- He who bathes in the water of the Manasa, thus withdrawn from the senses and seeking instructions from discrimination (*vivek*) and soul -- he verily attains liberation.

He who, firm in non-attachment, worships me, thinking of no other, full-visioned, with tranquil self, -- he verily attains liberation.

This eternal way of liberation has been described to you, O Garuda, -- hearing it with knowledge and dispassion one attains liberation.

- **Knowers of Truth attain liberation; righteous men go to heaven; sinners go to an evil condition (hell); birds and others transmigrate.**

Thus in sixteen chapters I have related to you the extracted essence of all the Scriptures. What else do you wish to hear?

Suta said: Having thus heard, O King, these words from the mouth of the Lord, Garuda, repeatedly prostrating himself, said this, with hands folded together:

- "O Lord, O God of Gods, having heard these words of nectar I have been helped over the ocean of existence, O Lord; O Protector!
 - "I stand freed from doubts. My desires have been completely fulfilled." Having said this, Garuda became silent and lost in meditation.
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